

Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind

Follow-up Report
July 2007

Office of Performance Evaluations
Idaho Legislature



Report 07-05F

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Acknowledgments

We appreciate the cooperation and assistance we received from the Board of Education and the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind. Sean Borzea and Ned Parrish of the Office of Performance Evaluations conducted this follow-up review. We contracted with Paul Headlee to perform quality assurance for this project.

Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind

Follow-up Report

In 2005, we issued a report on the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind addressing the school's responsibilities, enrollment, program costs, and use of assistive technologies. The evaluation directed nine recommendations to the Legislature, the State Board of Education, and the school. In this follow-up review, we found that three of our recommendations have been either resolved or implemented, while the remaining recommendations still require additional work. In addition, the board has undertaken a substantial review of the service delivery model for deaf and blind education in Idaho. The board is planning to propose changes to the service delivery model during the 2008 legislative session.

Background

The Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind (ISDB) was established in 1909 in Gooding, Idaho, as a state agency to serve sensory-impaired students. The school currently serves students at both its Gooding campus and around the state through outreach services. It has an annual budget of over \$8 million. The school is charged with providing “supplemental education services to deaf and blind students statewide” through “residential and day campus programs and outreach programs.”

Several factors prompted legislators to request an evaluation in 2005:

- Declining campus enrollment led to rising costs per student for campus services
- The school had provided services beyond the scope of legislative authorization
- Assistive technologies, such as the cochlear implant device, had created new opportunities for deaf students¹

¹ A cochlear implant is an electronic device surgically implanted in the inner ear to help the profoundly deaf detect sound.

Current Status

This follow-up review assesses the implementation of our recommendations by the Legislature, the Board of Education, and the School for the Deaf and the Blind. The school and the board have provided summaries of their implementation efforts in appendix A. Our review also includes updated information on student enrollment, costs per student, and results from our discussions with parents. In addition, we discuss efforts to establish a new model for deaf and blind education in the state.

Note: Recommendations listed here are not in numeric order, but their numbers correspond to those of the evaluation report.

Idaho Legislature

Recommendation 2.1: To ensure ISDB is operating according to legislative intent, and to provide accountability for ISDB services and functions, the Legislature should clarify the following areas of ISDB's authorizing statutes:

- *Responsibilities*
- *Populations to serve and eligibility requirements*
- *Service models*
- *Compliance with federal requirements*

In the 2006 legislative session, lawmakers amended Idaho Code § 33-3401 to clarify student eligibility and school responsibilities. This section of code now specifies that the school is to “provide early intervention and family consultation” as well as outreach services to students outside the campus area. Changes in code also align the state’s definition of deaf and blind children with federal law.

Status: This recommendation has been **implemented**.

State Board of Education

We made two recommendations to the State Board of Education, asking it to (1) ensure that school districts annually report the number of sensory-impaired students directly to ISDB, and (2) develop policies specifying the auditory-oral services ISDB is to provide.

Sensory-Impaired Student Census

Recommendation 2.3: To help ensure all students with sensory impairments in Idaho are provided a free and appropriate public education, the State Board of Education should ensure that school districts follow statutory requirements to annually report the number of sensory-impaired students in their districts to ISDB.

Idaho Code § 33-3408 requires school districts to annually report the number of hearing- and visually-impaired students in their districts directly to ISDB. Our 2005 evaluation found that districts submitted this information to the Department of Education, but ISDB only received a summary report upon request. According to ISDB officials, having the complete data would help to ensure that all students with sensory impairments are appropriately served.

Since the release of our evaluation, the board has not taken steps to ensure that districts report these numbers directly to ISDB. However, the recently approved standards establish a collaborative process for identifying sensory-impaired children, including children under school age. The process involves school districts, Idaho's Infant Toddler program, and the state entity responsible for educating sensory-impaired students (currently ISDB).

Status: This recommendation is **in process**.

Auditory-Oral Policies

Recommendation 5.1: To clarify ISDB's intent to provide auditory-oral training to students with cochlear implants and to address parent dissatisfaction, the Idaho State Board of Education should develop policies and procedures for the school that address program vision and administration, teacher qualifications and training, and curriculum development. Input from parents and ISDB staff should be sought during policy development.

Our 2005 evaluation found some parent dissatisfaction related to services provided to children with cochlear implants. Parents' concerns addressed a lack of services, a lower quality of services, and a lack of commitment to auditory-oral communication. Health care providers also raised concerns about ISDB's lack of commitment to quality education for children with cochlear implants. The board has not developed policies and procedures for auditory-oral training since our evaluation.

To understand parent opinions about auditory-oral training, we spoke with parents of two of the three students with cochlear implants who began receiving outreach services since the release of our 2005 evaluation.² One student's parent expressed satisfaction with ISDB services. The second student's parent expressed concerns about the outreach worker's ability to effectively teach the auditory-oral approach. We were unable to contact the parents of the third student.

We also spoke with parents of four of the eight children enrolled in classes provided in Meridian for children with cochlear implants. Parents of two of these children expressed satisfaction with the program, while parents of the other two

² Parents we interviewed had children who were five years or younger, had received a cochlear implant, and were enrolled in ISDB outreach services after January 2006.

children raised concerns. One parent criticized the lack of standardized curriculum. This parent was also concerned about the focus on language development rather than academic instruction. The other parent expressed concerns about the program not being able to adjust to the individual needs of the child.

Status: This recommendation has **not been implemented** because the board has not developed policies for auditory-oral training.

Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind

We made recommendations to the school in three areas: formalizing and revising interagency agreements; gathering, analyzing, and reporting enrollment, cost, and caseload information; and explaining communication options to parents of deaf or hearing-impaired children more effectively.

Interagency Agreements

Recommendation 2.2: To further clarify ISDB's responsibilities for providing education to sensory-impaired students, ISDB and cooperating agencies should revise their interagency agreements according to federal law and any changes in state statute.

Recent changes to state law have expanded the scope of school services to include services to young children, which aligns with the school's existing interagency agreements and practice.

Status: This recommendation has been **addressed** and requires no further action because changes to Idaho Code have resolved the discrepancy between statutory requirements and ISDB's interagency agreements.

Recommendation 4.2: To avoid potential legal and financial disputes, ISDB should formalize its arrangement of providing instructors to teach classes within the Meridian School District in an interagency agreement pursuant to Idaho Code § 67-2332.

The arrangement between ISDB and the Meridian School District has not been formalized. ISDB officials reported that they met with the Meridian School District in an attempt to formalize the arrangement. According to ISDB and school district officials, the Meridian School District has postponed formalizing the arrangement "until service delivery reform is determined" (see appendix A).

Status: This recommendation is **in process**.

Enrollment, Cost, and Caseload

Recommendation 3.1: To assist policymakers in making future decisions about the operation of the Gooding campus, ISDB should develop the following processes:

- *Establish an ongoing process for tracking campus enrollment*
- *Use enrollment trend data and other available information to regularly project future enrollment*
- *Report enrollment trends and projections to the State Board of Education and the Legislature on an annual basis.*

ISDB has taken minimal action in implementing this recommendation. The school reported limited campus enrollment information to the board in 2006 and to the Legislature in 2007, but it did not report enrollment trends or projections to either group.

As we reported in 2005, the number of students living on campus has fallen significantly in recent years. We found that average residential enrollment went from 98 students during the 1991–1992 school year to 43 for the 2004–2005 school year. For this follow up review, we updated ISDB enrollment data. As shown in exhibit 1, enrollment continues to decline in 2007 with only 32 students residing on the campus.

Exhibit 1: ISDB Average Campus Enrollment, by School Year

	<u>2004–05</u>	<u>2005–06</u>	<u>2006–07</u>
Residential students	43	38	32
Day students	37	36	33
Total	80	74	65

Source: Office of Performance Evaluations' analysis of ISDB enrollment data.

Status: This recommendation is **in process** because the school has made some progress in reporting enrollment data to the Legislature and the board, but the school still needs to improve reporting by providing enrollment trends and projections.

Recommendation 3.2: To improve economic efficiency, ISDB should work with the State Board of Education to develop a plan that identifies opportunities to address rising costs per student and share the results of these efforts with the Legislature. For example, a plan should address appropriate staffing levels for administration, instruction, maintenance, support, student-teacher ratios, number of cottages in operation, and use of the facilities for other purposes.

The Legislature and the school have taken a number of steps to control campus costs. These steps include transferring positions from campus to outreach, closing two campus student cottages, and eliminating positions. Documentation provided by the school shows a reduction in positions related to student cottages, nursing, and food service. Also, as campus enrollment has declined, ISDB has leased portions of the campus to other organizations (see appendix A).

Although the school has taken steps to address the rising cost per student on its campus, it has not developed a plan in cooperation with the board. Such a plan could more clearly specify targets for staffing levels, alternatives for facility use, and appropriate student-to-teacher ratios.

We analyzed data from fiscal year 2006 (the most recent data available) and compared our results to data in fiscal year 2005 that was provided in our evaluation report. We found that campus operating expenditures rose by 1.4 percent from \$5.7 million in fiscal year 2005 to \$5.8 million in fiscal year 2006.

During that same period, total campus enrollment declined from 80 students to 74, contributing to increases in costs per student. We found that costs for residential students rose 11 percent from \$81,964 to \$91,357 per student. Costs for day students (those receiving instruction at the campus but not residing on campus) rose 9 percent from \$59,062 to \$64,410 per student.

The continued decline in enrollment could result in even higher costs per student. An analysis of fiscal year 2007 expenditure data, which should be available late in July 2007, is necessary to assess whether the reductions in campus staffing and other changes are enough to curb further increases in costs per student.

Status: This recommendation is **in process** because the school has taken some steps to address rising costs, but it has not developed a plan to address rising costs per student resulting from declining campus enrollment.

Recommendation 4.3: To better understand resource demands, ISDB should separately measure caseload and workload and report this information to legislative committees.

Our 2005 evaluation found that the school did not have a good way of measuring workload for staff in its outreach program. The school used caseload figures to

justify its staffing requests to the Legislature. However, these caseload figures did not accurately portray actual staffing needs since cases vary in the amount of work they require.

Since the evaluation was released, ISDB has developed a way to assess workload that takes case differences into account. It uses workload information in making outreach staffing decisions. However, the school has not reported this workload information to legislative committees.

Status: This recommendation is **in process**.

Communication with Parents

Recommendation 4.1: To improve ISDB staff's ability to educate parents on communication options for their children, ISDB should take steps to ensure its staff understand the various options and can effectively communicate this information to parents.

ISDB has developed a required training program for all outreach staff, including standardized training materials. According to school officials, staff use these training materials when discussing communication options with families of hearing-impaired students. The school lists other trainings it provides in appendix A.

To assess the impact of these changes, we spoke with parents of 20 children with hearing impairments about their experiences with ISDB outreach staff.³ Overall, parents reported that the outreach workers presented the communication options completely and fairly, and they were satisfied with the communication option they selected for their children. Parents of children *not* using cochlear implants generally reported that the outreach worker discussed with them the auditory-oral approach as a communication option and the use of cochlear implants.

Status: This recommendation has been **implemented**.

Future Directions

In addition to our recommendations, the 2005 evaluation discussed the need for policymakers to consider other possible models for educating deaf and blind students. Following the release of our evaluation, the board assembled groups to review current services and recommend needed changes to the service delivery model for hearing-impaired and visually-impaired students.

³ Parents we interviewed had children who were five years or younger and enrolled in ISDB outreach services after January 2006.

The board assembled one group to address hearing-impaired education and one group for visually-impaired education. Each group is chaired by a member of the board and includes current and former legislators, and representatives from ISDB, Department of Education, and other agencies that serve deaf and blind individuals. These groups also include parents and sensory-impaired individuals. The board has hired two transition coordinators, one for deaf education and one for blind education. These coordinators will assist with the transition to the new service delivery model.

These groups have developed program standards for delivering educational services to sensory-impaired students, and the board approved those standards in June 2007. In addition, the groups have developed recommendations for changes to the service delivery model. As currently proposed, the model would separate deaf and blind education, establish regional day programs for hearing-impaired students, emphasize outreach programs, and move administration of the programs to the board.

The recommended changes to the service delivery model will be presented to the board by fall 2007. The board intends to finalize its recommendations for changes to the model in time for legislative consideration during the 2008 session.

Appendix A

Updates of Implementation Efforts



IDAHO STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS

April 2, 2007

Mr. Rakesh Mohan
Director, Office of Performance Evaluation
700 West State Street
Lower Level, Suite 10
PO Box 83720
Boise, ID 83720-0055

Re: Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind

Dear Rakesh:

Thank you for the opportunity to inform you of the progress the State Board of Education (Board) and Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind (ISDB) has made toward accomplishing the goals outlined in the October 2005 Report on Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind. The Board's and ISDB's progress is as follows:

2.3: To help ensure all students with sensory impairments in Idaho are provided a free and appropriate public education, the State Board of Education should ensure that school districts follow statutory requirements to annually report the number of sensory-impaired students in their districts to ISDB.

ISDB has historically accepted the annual count school districts submit to the State Department of Education of students who are hearing or visually impaired. However, this practice results in divergent reports by SDE and ISDB, causing confusion for stakeholders. ISDB met with the SDE in May 2006 to address the inconsistency, and identified the following variables, now identified on ISDB's data reports:

- SDE numbers include only school-age children whose IEP identifies hearing or vision impairment as the student's primary handicap.
- ISDB serves children who are birth to three years.
- ISDB serves students whose IEP does not identify hearing or vision as the primary disability.
- ISDB serves students who do not have an IEP, including students in home or private settings and students with 504 plans.

3.2: To improve economic efficiency, ISDB should work with the State Board of Education to develop a plan that identifies opportunities to address rising costs per student and share the results of these efforts with the Legislature. For example, a plan should address appropriate staffing levels for administration, instruction, maintenance, support, student-teacher ratios, number of cottages in operation, and use of the facilities for other purposes.

ISDB has performed annual reviews of personnel and program efficiencies, with the resultant changes: the closure of two cottages; the rental of part of the school facility to the Gooding public school district; reduction in administration, maintenance, nursing, cottage and instructor positions; transfer of FTEs from campus to outreach. These actions have resulted in decreased costs per campus student.

The facility in Gooding has long been used by a variety of community and state organizations for other purposes. During the 2006-07 school year a wing of the main building is being used by Gooding public schools to house their Kindergarten classes. The "Round Building" is used by the College of Southern Idaho for continuing education programs.

The ISDB Director and Director of Finance will work with the Deputy Director of the Board to develop recommended staffing levels.

5.1: To clarify ISDB's intent to provide auditory-oral training to students with cochlear implants and to address parent dissatisfaction, the Idaho State Board of Education should develop policies and procedures for the school that address program vision and administration, teacher qualifications and training, and curriculum development. Input from parents and ISDB staff should be sought during policy development.

ISDB, in partnership with the AG Bell Program Assistance Project and Idaho State University, has developed a program vision and mission, professional development opportunities for administration, teachers, and instructional aides, and curriculum. These efforts (over the past four years) provide a very solid foundation for the Board's development of policies and procedures.

Please let us know if we can provide any further information. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Karen L. Echeverria
Deputy Director

Cc: Mary Dunne, Director, Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind
Jason Hancock, Principal Budget Analyst, Budget and Policy Analysis
Randy Tilley, Acting Bureau Chief, Division of Financial Management

Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind

Serving the Deaf and the Blind Students of Idaho Since 1906

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1450 Main Street
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Date: April 6, 2007

To: Rakesh Mohan, Director
Office of Performance Evaluations
PO Box 83720
Boise, ID 83720-0055

From: Mary L. Dunne, Director
Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind

Re: Follow-up review of October 2005 report on the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind

Thank you for the opportunity to update your office regarding the implementation by the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind (ISDB) of the following recommendations made by the Office of Performance Evaluation (OPE) in October 2005. We appreciate the manner in which your evaluation was conducted and the ensuing attention to quality that has followed your work.

Below, we report ISDB's progress toward each of the six recommendations. Exhibits of related documentation are provided as indicated. We are pleased to offer additional information at your request.

2.2: To further clarify ISDB's responsibilities for providing education to sensory-impaired students, ISDB and cooperating agencies should revise their interagency agreements according to federal law and any changes in state statute.

Current interagency agreements between the ISDB and both of the lead agencies for the populations served are in place and in compliance with federal and state statute.

- Interagency Agreement: Idaho Department of Health and Welfare and Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind, 11-3-03. Recent update activities are suspended until June at the advice of DAG.
- Interagency Agreement between the Idaho State Department of Education and the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind, 3-2-07, reflects the resolution of a previous dispute related to transportation to and from ISDB's designated "drop-off" location. [Exhibit 2.2]

Access, Independence and Meaningful Integration for Everyone

ISDB provides a continuum of educational opportunities designed to meet the needs of children, families, and our state-wide service delivery partners.

3.1: To assist policymakers in making future decisions about the operation of the Gooding campus, ISDB should develop the following processes: Establish an ongoing process for tracking campus enrollment. Use enrollment trend data and other available information to regularly project future enrollment. Report enrollment trends and projections to the State Board of Education and the Legislature on an annual basis.

Campus student enrollment is tracked weekly and compiled for monthly analysis.
[Exhibit 3.1 A] ISDB also documents inquiries about ISDB in an effort to predict future enrollment. [Exhibit 3.1 B]

Enrollment data is shared with the Legislature in the form of annual JFAC and Education Committee Reports. ISDB Director will include enrollment data in its monthly meetings with the Executive Director of the State Board of Education.

3.2: To improve economic efficiency, ISDB should work with the State Board of Education to develop a plan that identifies opportunities to address rising costs per student and share the results of these efforts with the Legislature. For example, a plan should address appropriate staffing levels for administration, instruction, maintenance, support, student-teacher ratios, number of cottages in operation, and use of the facilities for other purposes.

ISDB has performed annual reviews of personnel and program efficiencies, with the resultant changes: the closure of two cottages; the rental of part of the school facility to the Gooding school district; reduction in administration, maintenance, nursing, cottage and instructor positions; and transfer of FTEs from campus to outreach. These actions have resulted in decreased costs per campus student.

The facility in Gooding is used by a variety of community and state organizations for other purposes, that include but are not limited to: the College of Southern Idaho, the University of Idaho, Northside Conference teams, Scouting groups, the Idaho Association of Deaf Athletes, the Walker Center, local churches, day care providers, and two psycho-social service providers. During the 2006-07 school year a wing of the main building has been used by Gooding school district Kindergarten classes.

The ISDB Director and Director of Finance will work with the Deputy Director of the State Board to develop recommended staffing levels.

4.1: To improve ISDB staff's ability to educate parents on communication options for their children, ISDB should take steps to ensure its staff understand the various options and can effectively communicate this information to parents.

Inservice training is provided twice each year to all outreach consultants and teachers, addressing selected professional topics to increase staff competencies in several areas. ISDB encourages and supports staff participation in other professional development activities and access to written resource information throughout the year.

Access, Independence and Meaningful Integration for Everyone

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Training specific to communication options has included, but is not limited to:

- SKI*HI Curriculum, 2006, Training (6 days)
- Auditory and Language Habilitation in Early Intervention (2 days)
- Early Years Conference (2 days)
- Post- Implant Home Visit Strategies (2 hours)
- Cochlear Implant Mapping and Observations (2 hours)
- Annual AG Bell Conferences (3 days)

Additionally, ISDB contracts auditory-oral specialists from Boise School District, Idaho State University and AG Bell in an effort to enhance staff competencies in spoken language methods. Through further collaboration with Health and Welfare, Elks Rehabilitation, Head Start, and Idaho Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, ISDB has participated in high quality professional workshops.

4.2: To avoid potential legal and financial disputes, ISDB should formalize its arrangement of providing instructors to teach classes within the Meridian School District in an interagency agreement pursuant to Idaho Code 67-2332.

ISDB's Superintendent and Directors of Outreach have met with Meridian School District administration and legal counsel in an attempt to formalize such an arrangement. Meridian administration chooses to postpone work on a collaborative plan until service delivery reform is determined. They have agreed, verbally, to provide two classrooms at River Valley Elementary for another school year.

4.3: To better understand resource demands, ISDB should separately measure caseload and workload and report this information to legislative committees.

ISDB outreach programs developed and implemented a caseload to workload formula in November 2005, which has been used continually to create monthly reports which inform staffing and special project decisions. [Exhibit 4.3]

Access, Independence and Meaningful Integration for Everyone

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Office of Performance Evaluations Reports Completed 2005–Present

Publication numbers ending with “F” are follow-up reports of previous evaluations. Publication numbers ending with three letters are federal mandate reviews—the letters indicate the legislative committee that requested the report.

<u>Pub. #</u>	<u>Report Title</u>	<u>Date Released</u>
05-01	Public Education Technology Initiatives	January 2005
05-02	Child Welfare Caseload Management	February 2005
05-01HTD	Use of Social Security Numbers for Drivers' Licenses, Permits and Identification Cards	February 2005
05-01F	Management of Correctional Data	March 2005
05-03	Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind	October 2005
05-04	State Substance Abuse Treatment Efforts	December 2005
06-01	Management in the Department of Health and Welfare	February 2006
06-02	Idaho Student Information Management System (ISIMS)—Lessons for Future Technology Projects	August 2006
06-01F	Public Works Contractor Licensing Function	August 2006
06-02F	Idaho Child Care Program	August 2006
06-03F	Timeliness and Funding of Air Quality Permitting Programs	August 2006
06-04F	Fiscal Accountability of Pupil Transportation	August 2006
06-05F	School District Administration and Oversight	August 2006
06-06F	Public Education Technology Initiatives	August 2006
06-07F	Higher Education Residency Requirements	August 2006
07-01	Use of Average Daily Attendance in Public Education Funding	February 2007
07-02	Virtual School Operations	March 2007
07-03F	Higher Education Residency Requirements	July 2007
07-04F	State Substance Abuse Treatment Efforts	July 2007
07-05F	Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind	July 2007
07-06F	Public Education Technology Initiatives	July 2007

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